THE JKD GOSPEL ACCORDING TO HOWARD

By Johnny J. Williams Jr.

Sifu Howard M. Williams Jr. was present when history was made. He was a full member of the legendary Oakland Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do kwoon under the direction of the late Jun Fan arts instructor James Yimm Lee. Almost from the very beginning of the school and even until well after Lee's unfortunate passing in 1972, Howard continued to train in JFJKD diligently. Howard was there when the art's late founder, Bruce Lee, transitioned the training from straight Jun Fan gung-fu to the art/process known as jeet kune do. Bobby Baker, one of sifu Jimmy's (as James Lee was affectionately known) senior most students, who recently died, handed the reins of the Oakland JFJKD experience officially over to Howard just as James had handed them over to him (Baker) shortly before his own death in 1972.

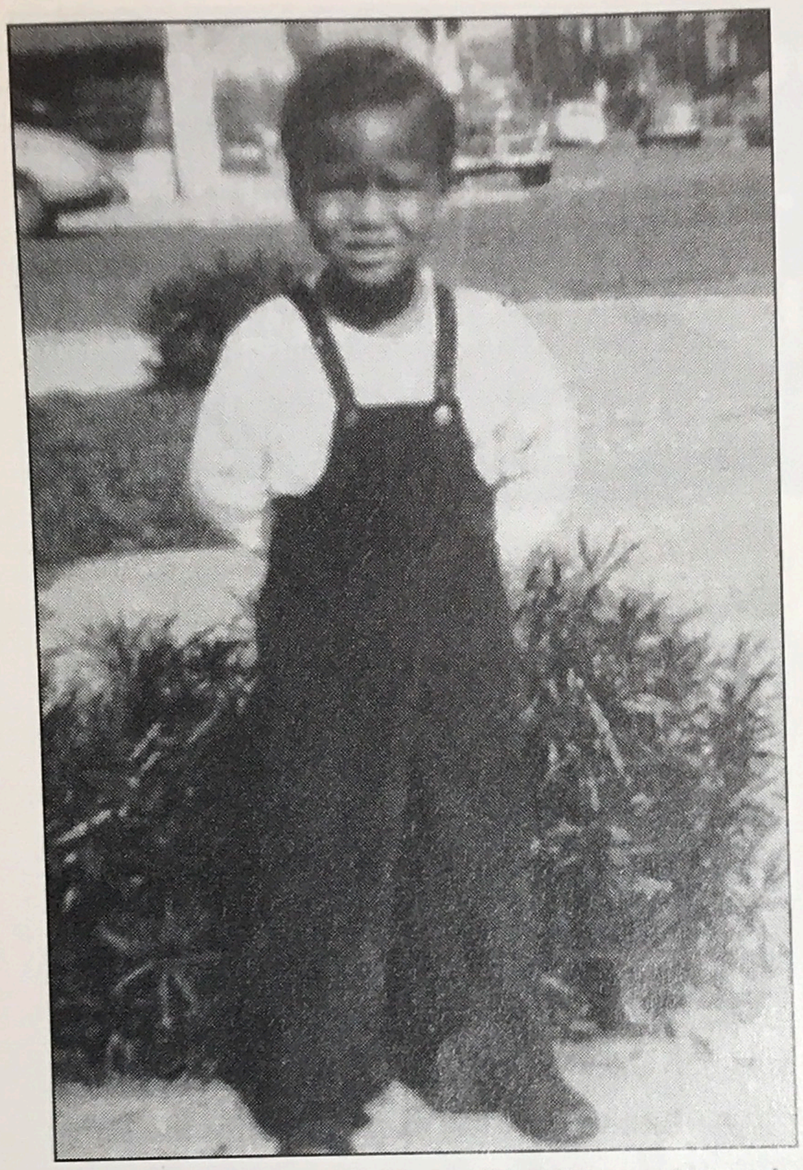
Additionally, by nearly unanimous decision of the surviving senior Oakland kwoon members, and with the support of James Lee's own son, Greglon, Howard is the official spokesperson, representative, and active senior authorized instructor in the Oakland branch of Jun Fan jeet kune do.

Jesse R. Glover, who was Bruce Lee's first American friend, his first student, his first assistant instructor, and the first person authorized by Bruce Lee himself to independently instruct in the arts developed by Bruce, had the following to say about Howard: "Howard is Bruce and James Lee's best student from the Oakland period. He is the best JKD man that I have ever seen. Howard is a fast, powerful puncher and kicker who can move like Bruce. He is one of the few people who can give a good representation of Bruce's art. Howard is living proof that JKD is not just an abstract idea or concept that used to live only in Bruce and James Lee. If you want to know what Bruce and James were doing in Oakland, Howard is definitely the man to see."

Sifu Williams has recently re-emerged to bring some clarity to what was actually taught at

---

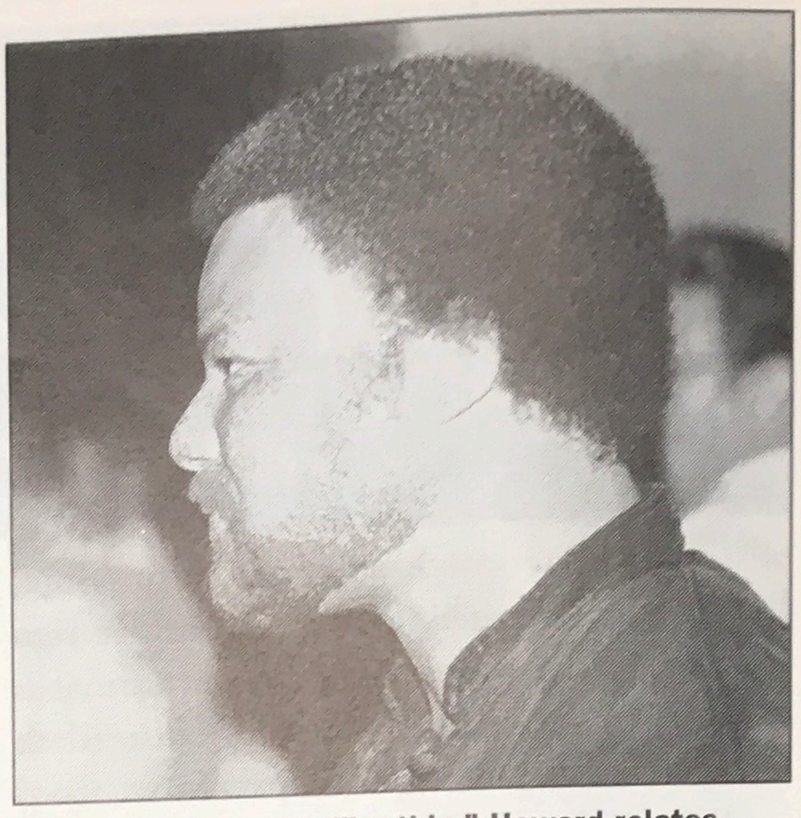
Johnny J. Williams, Jr. (no relation to Howard) runs a small, private gung-fu club in Illinois which trains in non-classical gung-fu and modified wing chun/JKD. This is his first contribution to *Inside Kung-Fu*.



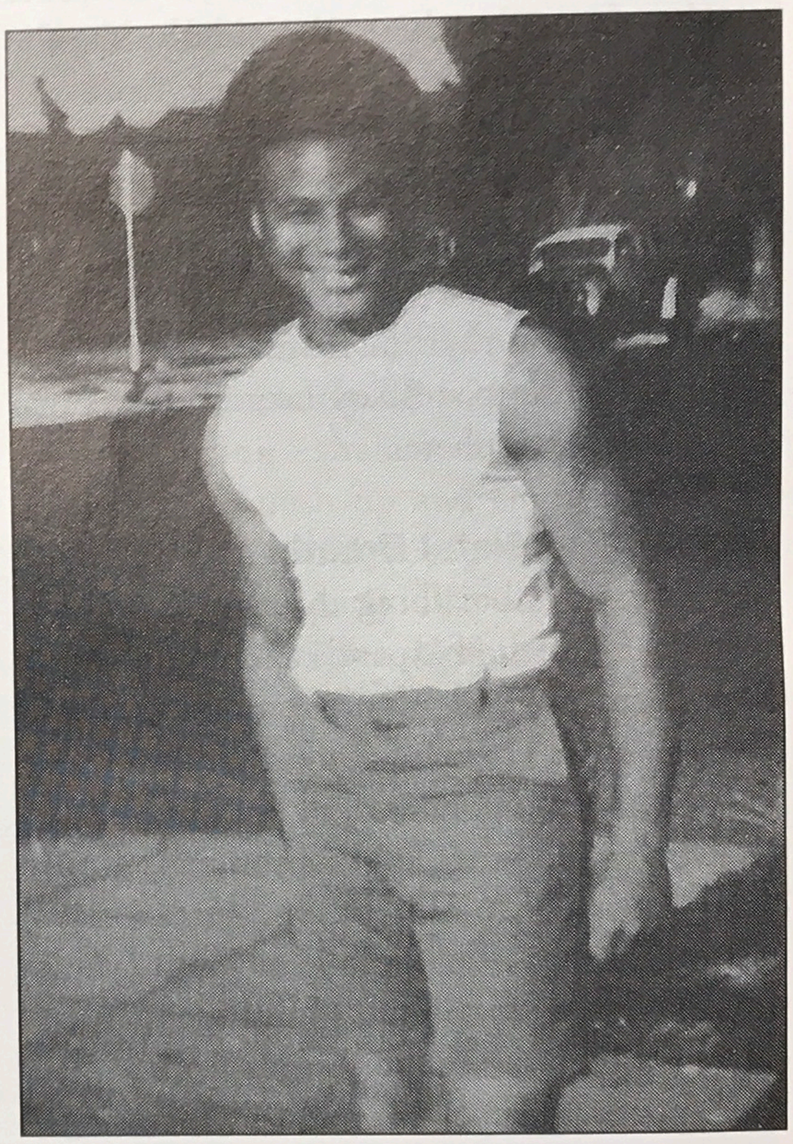
Howard Williams as a 4-year-old child growing up in the rough part of West Oakland. Each street-corner scrimmage brought him closer to the doorstep of Bruce and James Lee's school in 1964.

"When I'm kicking this bag," Howard Williams says, "I don't see the bag. I only see the planks behind. When I'm kicking the enemy, I always aim at the empty space behind the target."

As a student of both James Yimm Lee and Bruce Lee at the Oakland school, Howard Williams may be the best man to set the record straight on the way jeet kune do should be taught.



"There are moments like this," Howard relates, "when I wish Bruce and James were alive. I truly miss them."



Young Howard Williams on the streets of Oakland, Calif., shortly before Bruce Lee's passing.

The Oakland Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do class. On the far left is Bob Baker (of *Chinese Connection* fame), who was Bruce Lee's bodyguard in Hong Kong. On the far right is Richard Carney, Howard Williams' stepfather and James Lee's student. Directly to his left is a shirtless James Lee. At Lee's left is a teen-aged, muscular Howard Williams.

the Oakland school. His many decades of training and experience make him an undeniably rich source of martial knowledge as well as lore on the two who have become legends, Bruce and James Lee. In this exclusive interview, we address some misconceptions, and guide those who are interested in the truth, to a greater understanding of the art of Jun Fan jeet kune do.

INSIDE KUNG-FU: Where are you from and how did you get involved with Bruce and James Lee?

HOWARD WILLIAMS: I was born and raised in Oakland, Calif. I am the oldest of a family of one sister and two brothers. At the age of 14 I ran away from my father to join Bruce and James Lee's school. The year was 1964. My real father didn't want me to have any part of it. It was my mother who found Bruce's school first, then she and my stepfather told me about it. My stepdad and I had a lot of fun.

IKF: Then your stepfather was a practitioner as well?

HW: Yes. We practiced together all the time. I remember we used to sit down in front of the TV and make our own protective equipment. It was crude, but effective. Then we would go outside and try it out. That was a lot of fun.

IKF: Can you give us an example?

HW: Sure. I remember during one of our sparring sessions I landed a good kick that sent him through our neighbor's fence. She looked out the window, and to our surprise started laughing. We still had to replace her fence, though. That was just one of the great moments we had together as a family, and as gung-fu training partners. Usually after those sessions my mother would cook these great dinners and we all sat around the table laughing and talking shop. My mother passed away in 1980, and I think my stepfather just returned to his native state of Hawaii. I truly loved and miss then both.

IKF: Let's switch gears here. What prompted you to study martial arts in the first place?

HW: I've always wanted to learn some type of fighting art. As a kid growing up I was always involved in some sort of scrimmage. As I got older they became more serious. Though I am a peace-loving person by nature, I was afraid there was going to be someone out there one day who wouldn't share my sentiments. So (through gung-fu) I got myself some extra assurance. But like I always say, "If fighting is the only place you can apply your art, you've missed three-fourths of its meaning."

IKF: Volumes have been written about your instructor Bruce Lee, but tell us, what did James Lee mean to you as a teacher?

HW: Without his guidance and caring instruction it would have been impossible for me to have developed the way that I did. I could not have asked for a better teacher.

> "JKD, contrary to popular belief, is not about moving from art to art. That's not how Bruce worked it or taught it. JKD is the art in its own right. And it covers all ranges in and of itself."

Howard Williams demonstrates the jeet kune do bi-jong. Note the forward, bent-knee small phasic stance.

IKF: What did Bruce and Jimmy mean by jeet kune do?

HW: Literally translated, jeet means "stop", or "to intercept". Kune means "fist". Do means "way". Simply translated it means, "The Way of the Intercepting Fist." And incidentally, once you get it, that's how it should function for you. If you are working any other way, what you are doing is not, I repeat, is not Bruce Lee's jeet kune do.

IKF: What were some of the differences between the earlier Jun Fan gung-fu training that you first experienced under them, and the training after Bruce transitioned every thing into the art of jeet kune do?

HW: In the earlier art (Jun Fan gung-fu) more emphasis was placed on a lot of trapping techniques. We used the wing chun stance, and while the footwork was more alive than the classical versions it wasn't yet what it would become. When Bruce Lee's jeet kune do was introduced to us, the Jun Fan gung-fu students, the wing chun stance was changed to the small phasic bent-knee position. This was done to provide a more economical base, and quicker delivery. Much less emphasis was placed on trapping, and more on hitting. Trapping was only used as a bi-product for hitting. We did all of the traps (so don't think that we didn't have them or didn't know them), but through Jimmy's innovative, combat-oriented training we learned how to pare them down, cut them in half (delivery wise) for more combat realism. The footwork remained quick, easy, and alive, but it was even more so. The idea is to put yourself where you are safe, but your opponent is not (smile). JKD footwork is about extreme economy, non-telegraphic moves, and sudden delivery of power. There was no wasted energy when training under Jimmy. I see too much of that going on in the ranks of JKD today.

IKF: Why do so many current renditions of jeet kune do look so much like wing chun?

HW: I'm glad you asked this question. The reason is that most teachers are still putting too much emphasis on the trapping techniques instead of hitting. Like Jimmy taught us, they should cut down the movement, and economize. Trapping is an adjunct to hitting. Period. Always think hit, hit, and more hit.

IKF: So, why don't we see more Bruce-like development from the ranks of today's JKD students?

HW: Because the teachers themselves don't possess the necessary skills. It's just that simple.

IKF: What is missing from the way current instructors are teaching, and the way the students are training?

HW: In my opinion the teachers are missing continuity, and simplicity in their instructions, and the students are missing natural fluidity in their training.

IKF: Then, what makes JKD work for you and what has been its most alluring characteristic?

HW: JKD works for me because over the years, and due to the manner in which Bruce and Jimmy used to train us at the Oakland kwoon, it has become a way of thinking and a state of being. I must admit that it wasn't always that way. In the beginning I lost my natural fluidity. I was concentrating too much on technique, and form. In other words I was standing in my own way.

But as surely as time rolled on, Bruce and Jimmy both saw what I needed, and helped me to concentrate more on my inner expression, which in turn helped me to tailor the art to my personal abilities. This allowed my techniques to "happen by themselves". At that point I regained the natural fluidity that I'd possessed before I learned the art. So by adapting to jeet kune do's philosophy of simplicity, and directness (which by the way is its most alluring characteristic to me), it became a part of my thinking, and a part of all that I do in life. Remember what I have already stated, about if fighting is the only place you can apply your art you've missed three-fouths of it.

IKF: What other martial arts are in your back-

ground?
HW: I'm proud to say that Jun Fan gung-fu and jeet kune do were the only martial arts ever introduced into my life, and I got them directly from the original source.
IKF: What is your opinion on adding other art forms to JKD?
HW: This is very easy to answer. In fact, I could go on and on with the reasons why I would never add other arts to JKD, but, like JKD itself, I will be simple and direct. Let me ask you a question. If you start off with the color (pure) white, and you added the color purple to it would you still have white, or would you have a conflicting mess of this color or that color? What happened to the original color? It became lost in obscurity! Get the big picture? JKD, contrary to popular belief, is not about moving from art to art. That's not how Bruce worked it or taught it. JKD is the art in its own right. And it covers all ranges in and of itself.
IKF: What was the nickname that Bruce Lee personally gave you?
HW: Bruce used to call me "rugged".
IKF: Why did he call you rugged?
HW: It had to be because of my physical build, and tenacious attitude at that time, along with my willingness to mix it up with the older, and more experienced fighters. Remember, I was put into the advanced class straight off the street.
IKF: You were still just a teenager back then, correct?
HW: Yes, the only one there, and I trained and sparred against grown men. So after a period of time of intense training under Jimmy and Bruce I knew that my stuff worked. I mean it really worked! You see, Jimmy took me under his wing from the very beginning and personally made sure that I was extremely well-trained. You could say that I was his protegé.
IKF: Sounds like sifu Jimmy was very "street effective"-oriented in his training of you guys.
HW: Right, and Bruce as well.
IKF: What does one need to be a good streetfighter?
HW: Have your head examined! I know that this sounds funny, but it's true. In order to become a good streetfighter you must first examine the contents in your head, and be willing to empty out all that would stand in the way of your freedom of expression. If not, you will have beaten yourself long before your opponent lays his hands on you. I've termed this self-examination emotional intelligence.
IKF: Explain the term "reality of combat".
HW: It simply means non-predicting and ever-changing. In fact, the reality of combat is probably among the most rapidly of changing environments, next to the biological cell divisions in our bodies. Things in combat happen quickly.
IKF: Did Bruce and Jimmy encourage the Oakland students to engage in weight training?
HW: Not in the Oakland school, but they did encourage each of us to develop a supplemental training program to fit our individual needs. If it included weights for some, so be it.
IKF: Do you do any weight training in your work out routine?
HW: I personally have never used them in my whole life.
IKF: You are a very powerful man. How do you explain having so much power in your techniques without the use of weights?
HW: First of all, I was genetically born with the tools needed for speed and power. James saw this and he helped me to develop a program using my own body's mass against different devices. This cultivated all the muscular strength that I would need to facilitate the power and speed required for impact. Let me say that a truly competent JFJKD teacher can help even those not genetically predisposed to natural speed and power to find their own optimum ability. Often the student finds success with greater speed, and more striking power than they would ever have dreamed themselves possible of achieving. It's lots of hard work, but it can be done. This too was a hallmark of those from the Oakland school.

"To become a good streetfighter you must first examine the contents in your head, and be willing to empty out all that would stand in the way of your freedom of expression. If not, you will have beaten yourself long before your opponent lays his hands on you."

IKF: When Bruce appeared as Kato on The Green Homet television program, how did it make you feel?
HW: Very proud and motivated. I remember seeing one of the first episodes in 1967. I was 17 years old and sitting in my, then, girl friend's living room. She wanted to hug and kiss, and instead I wanted to watch my sifu on The Green Homet. As you can imagine when the show was over, so was our relationship together. With my next girlfriend I made sure there was no Bruce Lee on television when we were together.
IKF: What was the comradeship like among the guys at the Oakland school?
HW: We were always like a tight-knit family. We all got along well, and had a lot of fun. Even today, with those of us left, there's still a kinship, and brotherhood among us.

Wing Chun Today

Wing Chun Today is the voice of the Wing Chun enthusiast around the world.

- Read in over ten countries plus Canada and England
- Unique non-organizational, non-political stance
- Articles from both famous and new practitioners
- Opinions, observations, book, tape & seminar reviews

Past articles include:
"Interview with Ip Chun" • "Siu Nin Tao"
"The Centerline Theory"
"Origins and Development of Wing Chun"
"Build Your Own Wooden Dummy"
and many, many more.

To subscribe
send $26.50 (U.S.) or $39.50 (outside U.S.)
check or money order to:

Wing Chun Today
c/o MARK GRAPHICS, INC.
5731 N.E. 14th Avenue • Fort Lauderdale, FL 33334
MasterCard/Visa or Sample Issue, Call: 1-800-953-0522
http://www.wing-chun-today.com
mcmark@gate.net

WRITERS • ADVERTISERS

AUTHENTIC
INDONESIAN PENCAK SILAT
BY PENDEKAR WILLIAM SANDERS
Tape 1-The Eleven Principles of Destruction
Tape 2-Advanced Fighting Techniques-
The deadly python and black cobra systems, fighting multiple opponents, lock escapes, and more.
Tape 3-Tanaga Dallam-Inner power development and how to use it for fighting.
Tape 4-Indonesian Weapons-Advanced knife and karambit (tiger claw) fighting, and more.
Each video tape costs $39.00, or 2 for $69.00, or 3 for $99.00, or 4 for $119.00 (+S&H).
To order call **800-247-6553**
or **419-281-1802**

VK VT
詠 春
(Since 1975)
CLASSICAL VING TSUN SCHOOL
The Superior System
By Grandmaster **VICTOR KAN**
Yip Man's top student from the 1950's and the most qualified man as **YIP MAN'S SUCCESSOR.**
He keeps the highest standard. The purity is 99% as YIP MAN taught him, no more or no less. So it can be passed authentically to the next generation.
SEEING IS BELIEVING
Authorized branch taught by fully qualified instructor K. Gledhill, grades tested by GM Kan monthly.
128 Mott St. Chinatown, New York City, (212) 625-9819
http://www.brunel.ac.uk/~mtpgpac/vkvt 2.htm

New Videos from Unique Publications!

HSING-I CHUAN

FEATURING

GERALD A. SHARP

Hsing-I Chuan is an internal martial arts system used to improve health, power, and strength. This Five Fists, 12 Animals system was popularized by Jiang Rong Qiao who was a student of both Zhang Zao Dong and Li Cun Yi. Sharp studied the system with Zou Shuxian and also with internal arts Master Cheng Jie Feng.

FIVE FISTS OF POWER, Part 1

This tape takes you through Hsing-I's basic training of hands and stances; as well as the applications and forms training for the 2 Splitting Fists, the Drilling Fist, and the Four Variations of Bursting (Crushing) of the Jiang Rong Qiao Hsing-I system. This tape introduces you to the practicality of Hsing-I both as a training tool, and a self defense art. While Hsing-I appears straightforward, you will be introduced to the slight angles, turns, and close range techniques of this rare internal art. Running time: 60 minutes. **#HSI501**

FIVE FISTS OF POWER, Part 2

Tape Two completes the Five Fists with many useful applications and forms training for the Pounding and Crossing Fists, as well as teaching the applications and forms for Two Linking forms. These two linking forms known as: "Transformation of the Five Fists" and "Single Linking of the Five Fists," are useful for tying together the principles of Splitting, Drilling, Bursting (Crushing), Pounding, and Crossing. By connecting the Five Fists, you will learn why Hsing-I Chuan is known as the penetrating internal martial art. Running time: 46 minutes.

POWER TRAINING

POWER TRAINING teaches three Hsing-I Standing Meditations (Zhanzhuang): the Infinity Posture, Listening to The Sea, and the Bear Posture for developing energy, power, and health; Hsing-I Push Hands for developing sensitivity, power, and root; and, useful self-defense applications and forms training for a Hsing-I Animals Power form (Hsing-I Hong Chuan). This tape is useful to a variety of martial arts practitioners, as well as internal arts practitioners such as Ta'i Chi Ch'uan and Pa Kua Chang. Running time: 60 minutes **#HSIP**

12 ANIMALS, Part 1

This tape demonstrates all 12 Animals of the Jiang Rong Qiao Hsing-I system, as well as applications and forms training for the Dragon, Tiger, Monkey, Horse, and Alligator. The 12 Animals build on the principles of the Five Fists and the Linking concepts. Utilizing the behaviors and movements of mythical and wild animals to develop a barrage of useful, practical self defense techniques. Running time: 52 minutes. **#HSI1201**

12 ANIMALS, Part 2

This tape completes the 12 Animals with applications and forms training for the Fighting Chicken, Falcon, Swallow, Snake, Ta'i (Ostrich), and the Combined Eagle/Bear. This tape also provides a Daily Practice Companion to practice the forms, and continues to build on the principles of the Five Fists and the Linking Concepts. Applications which emphasize Hsing-I's strikes are coupled with Hsing-I's close range techniques of grappling and throwing. Running time: 60 minutes. **#HSI1202**

$39.95 each

UNIQUE PUBLICATIONS VIDEO

4201 W. Vanowen Place,
Burbank, CA 91505 U.S.A.
For credit card orders, call toll free:

1-800-332-3330

Fax orders:
1-800-249-7761 (U.S.);
1-818-845-7761 (Outside U.S.)

PAL format tapes are available for an additional $10 each. Prices subject to change without prior notice.

IKF: Sifu Williams, why are you coming out after remaining in the background for so long?
HW: Most of you I'm sure are familiar with how computers work. If so, then you also know how anti-virus programs operate, how they always run in the background protecting the integrity of your computer's operating system. So it is with me. I was always content to remain in the background letting each man develop in his own way. But, after seeing for many years the integrity, philosophy, and true methodology of Bruce's arts constantly compromised, and Jimmy's contributions all but ignored, I was compelled to come forth to protect them and also to set the records straight, at least as to what was taught at the Oakland school.
IKF: How would you respond if someone called you a fake?
HW: That question never entered my mind, but since you brought it up, do you recall the bible story of "The Ten Commandments?" Pharaoh didn't believe in the God of Moses, and called Moses a fake. So, Moses cast down his rod, and it turned into a serpent. Then Pharaoh had his magicians do the same. They too turned into serpents. But Moses' serpent swallowed up the other serpents. So what would I do if someone called me a fake? I'd simply tell them to stand in front of me for two or three seconds, and let the outcome take care of itself. Get the picture?
IKF: Do you still train everyday?
HW: Yes I do. I have trained steadily since 1964 when I first met Bruce. I'm always finding ways to improve and fine tune my skills, and natural weapons. Jimmy and Bruce used to call them our "tools".
IKF: What are some of the personal innovations that you have made in the art?
HW: If I told you that you would know as much as I do. In order for that to happen you must first become my student. But I will tell you this much. Whatever I'm doing, will always involve hacking away at the nonessentials. The less you have to remember, the more effective you become.
IKF: Finally, what are your thoughts on sifu Jesse Glover, who seems to have a positive regard for your knowledge and abilities?
HW: Jesse Glover is senior to all of us who are in the Jun Fan (Bruce Lee) arts. I hold his wisdom about life and his fighting art in the highest regard. I only hope, that if it is God's will for me to reach his age, that I would be half as good and effective as he is. I would also like to extend a special thanks to Linda (Lee) Cadwell, and The Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do Nucleus for their coordinated efforts in preserving and advancing "the original format" of Jun Fan gung-fu and jeet kune do.

For more information, Contact Howard Williams, P.O. Box 6164, San Pablo, CA 94806.